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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KE](#)
SUBJECT: KENYA: JOURNALISTS QUESTIONED OVER ASSASSINATION
PLOT REPORT

REF: A. 06 NAIROBI 4902

[1](#)B. 06 NAIROBI 2616

Classified By: Political Counselor Larry Andre for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Following Kenyan daily The Standard's report of an alleged assassination plot against former President Moi's son, four of the paper's managers were questioned by police on April 16 at police headquarters. Human rights groups rallied to support the newspaper, decrying the six-hour questioning as a violation of media freedom. While in custody, the men were not allowed access to their lawyers, and were ultimately released without being charged. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) Following the publication on April 16 in the Standard of a report alleging an assassination plot against former President Moi's son Gideon, four members of the paper's management team were summoned for questioning by police. The four, including the Managing Editor and the Chief Operating Officer, were at police headquarters for six hours on April [1](#)16. In the meantime, opposition politicians and human rights organizations gathered at the station decrying the incident as an abuse of media freedom. The four managers of the Standard newspaper, which is owned by former president Moi, were released later that night without being charged.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The article which sparked the April 16 interrogation reported that in a tape-recorded interview, one of the infamous Artur brothers, Margaryan, stated he had been contacted by a Kenyan minister. (NOTE: The Artur brothers first appeared publicly in March 2006 amid allegations that they had been brought to the country by high-level Kenyans as mercenaries. They claimed to be businessmen, but were also linked to the March 2006 government raid on the Standard. END NOTE.) The minister wanted to hire the Arturs to kidnap and assassinate Gideon Moi, also the member of parliament for Baringo South (KANU). In response, Gideon Moi stated in April 17 media reports that he was advised by Kenyan security services last year to boost his personal security in light of a possible threat.

Standard: "Government Intimidation"

[1](#)4. (SBU) One of the men questioned, Standard Group Managing Editor Chaacha Mwita told public affairs specialist that his newspaper views the summoning and interrogation as a personal war against the Standard, "orchestrated by a group of

personalities" led by Internal Security Minister John Michuki. (NOTE: Michuki is the minister who boasted about ordering the March 2006 raid on the Standard. Direction of the Kenyan police services falls under his ministry. END NOTE.) Mwita noted that he and his colleagues were interrogated by the Serious Crimes Police Unit, and that he does not expect any charges to be pressed.

15. (SBU) The conduct of the interrogation offended Mwita and human rights organizations. Mwita commented that the Standard journalists were called to police headquarters via a statement faxed to all media outlets, rather than by a formal summons. At the police station officers prohibited him from speaking to the press. For the hours he and his colleagues were at the station, they were barred from communicating with their lawyers. Kenyan human rights groups called the journalists' denial of counsel a serious affront to media freedom. The Chairman of the Law Society of Kenya told poloff he was concerned by the reemergence of a tactic (interrogation without legal representation) used by past Kenyan regimes.

16. (C) One of the Standard's lawyers who was locked out of police headquarters on April 16, Otiende Amollo, told poloff that there was no intention at all on the part of law enforcement to gain more information about the alleged plot. It was simply Michuki's attempt to get ahead of the Standard's story and learn what information the newspaper had. Amollo added that the journalists handed over copies of the taped Standard interview with Artur Margaryan to police; the interrogation was just harassment and intimidation at the behest of an minister who acts with complete impunity. He remarked that Michuki "is so tangled up in this whole (Arturs) thing, he had to do it."

The Arturs Make Headlines, Again

17. (SBU) The Arturs were removed (not deported) from Kenya after a security incident at the country's main airport in June 2006 (ref A). Although there were allegations (from Opposition leader Raila Odinga) that the men were back in Kenya in November 2006 (ref B), it was never clear that this was indeed the case. Odinga made similar claims last week, which prompted the government to issue a statement denying the allegations as "cheap propaganda." In its April 12 statement the government also lashed out at the media for irresponsibly publishing graphics which depicted the Arturs at State House. On 4/12/06 the Standard's story, Michuki called a press conference at which he read a six-point statement. In his defense Michuki denied having any more information about the Arturs than he had already stated, and accused the Standard of a "vendetta" against him.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: The police could reasonably argue that they questioned the Standard managers in the interest of protecting Gideon Moi - they have an obligation to investigate such serious allegations. They did not, however, make that justification, and the manner in which the four newspapermen were held, without access to legal representation (customary, but not explicitly provided for in the Kenyan constitution), smacks of punishing the messenger. The government's past attempts to intimidate the Standard proved effective only at raising public ire. The day after the questioning, the Standard's taunt -- that it will broadcast the entire taped interview with Artur, including as yet unpublished explosive items -- suggests this incident too, will not muzzle the newspaper. END COMMENT.
RANNEBERGER